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CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

15



NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

It's hard to believe that the Tour is almost over. It's November 26 (Thanksgiving for you Yanks, so the office is wonderfully quiet today) and as I type this, Houston and Killeen constitute the last stop and are almost two full weeks away. This issue, I'll talk about Portland and New York. Next issue about Cleveland and Texas and then comparative normalcy for the first time in over a year.

Each of the stops has run just about the same; arrive in town, do the publicity interviews, the shop signing, the convention and in between times take advantage of the numbing sameness of hotel rooms to get a jump on writing the book. Before I left for Portland, Diana Schutz faxed through a letter volunteering chauffeur service while I was in town. Ordinarily I reject these kind of offers, preferring to arrange limousines for the publicity side and to rely on the store owner for transportation to and from the signing. But I hadn't had an opportunity to bandy words with Lady Di for almost six years and I was very curious as to what she might have to say about Mothers & Daughters (being a feminist of the distinctly non-rhetorical variety. *Rare* avip). She picked me up at the airport, bought me dinner and we nattered away for hours and hours; gossiping about the business, reminiscing about our first meeting (the first Tour, in Berkeley; almost ten years to the day). Diana is truly the only editor besides Archie Goodwin I have ever had any respect for. How she manages to endure working at Dark Horse is quite beyond me particularly as they are in the midst of the same sort of Market Share at *Price* (publishing that *Eclipse*, *Pacific* and *Fantagraphics* have all gone through at one time or another ("We'll publish anything! Just give us a call!"). She told me that Mike Richardson's theory is that if you don't continue to expand, you'll stagnate. I countered with my own theory; if you don't stay small, you become corrupt. It was a wonderful evening (once we got past the Dark Horse thing) and I felt quite like a human being for a change. I'd forgotten what a great person she is to bounce ideas off of and she is now near the top of my consultancy list with Marder, Bisette and Colabouvo.

The next night, Todd McFarlane had invited me to Toddmeister Mansion for dinner, so that was two days in a row of feeling distinctly like a human being. His lovely and gracious wife, Wanda prepared an elaborate Greek feast. There appeared to be enough food to feed an army, but by the end of it Todd, Terry Fitzgerald (the super-efficient director of Todd McFarlane Incorporated) and myself were wrestling over the last scraps. Easily the best meal I've had in the last two years (except, of course, my Mum's roast beef and Yorkshire pudding). Thank you, Wanda. We spent quite a while in Todd's upstairs studio/offices looking at artwork and reviewing Todd's plans to conquer the known universe in the name of creative freedom. He tried to give me back the original for the pin-up in *Spawn* #4, and then offered to buy it. Since I had intended it as a gift in the first place, I declined. But I did sign it to him, thanking him for a lovely evening, a great meal and his daughter's spit (Cyan kept insisting on handing me a small toy once she had lubricated it thoroughly).

Friday morning I enjoyed very much being interviewed by *Cerebus* fan Lynn Siprelle (I hope I spelled that right, Lynn) at KINK, a few blocks from my hotel. Since we were sequestered in our little domain within the station, she even let me smoke, which was very nice of her. Then I went back to the hotel and read *Spawn* #1 through 5 as well as the photocopies of Alan's story in script/thumbnail form and whiled away a wonderful afternoon, writing the dialogue for my issue of *Spawn*. Spending two days as a human being exacted a great toll on my writing; the story has (gasp) a happy ending. Diana and I went out for dinner again Friday (I paid this time). Saturday she gave me a lift to KBOO FM, where I was interviewed by a *Cerebus* fan again (his name slips my mind; please write in and give me hell). Then she dropped me at *Future Dreams*, Don Rioridan's wonderful store in East Burnside. A great, well-organized signing; well-attended that ran a little over five hours. *Cerebus* appeared on the front page of the *Oregonian* as well as very nice mentions in the *Willamette* and the *Downtowner*. The convention was great. Todd and Terry and Cyan (this time she kept her saliva to herself) came in towards the end. Diana gave me a lift to the airport and that was it for jet lag month.

NYC. The Big Apple.

My favourite city in the whole world. Apart from a small mention in the *New York Post* and the taping of *Word Balloons* (Keith DeCandido and John Drew's comic book cable access show) there was no publicity so I got to enjoy myself for a change. Tuesday night I went on a pub crawl with Connie Lingus (after she bought me dinner) through the seamy underside of Greenwich Village. She has a for-real job as production manager at a magazine which is making her miss all of her favourite television shows. We finished carousing about four thirty in the morning (indeed, the city that never sleeps) since she had to go to work at eight. I slept 'til about one-thirty then went and bought myself a ticket for the *Rangers/Cape* game that night. Had dinner with Fred (Funkmaster G-Berg) Greenberg and his daughter Izzy at the hotel. I got to watch the *Rangers* blow a one goal lead. Trailing 5-3 in the third with about two minutes to go. Andy Van Heilemond disallowed two *Rangers* goals inside of a minute. You've never heard a crowd blow off steam at a ref until you've heard a Manhattan crowd blow off steam at a ref. Thursday, feeling more than a little guilty about just enjoying myself, I decided to do a spontaneous Greenwich Village Tour, walking down to *St. Mark's Comics* (great store) and autographing a bunch of *Cerebus* stuff (including an impressive supply of phone books they had ordered for Christmas). Then over to *Village Comics* on Bleecker Street, where Joe (Hi, Joe) even pulled out a little card table for me to sign books (again, a large supply) including a couple for customers who happened by. Then it was over to *All Comics* (new store) on Carmine (Hi Greg, Hi George) to sign their stock of back issues and reprint volumes. That night, Connie and I went out for dinner and then over to the *Word Balloons* studio on 59th St. where we had quite a bit of time to talk with Keith since the previous show was running overtime (Ed Koch was the guest and you know how he does go on). Finally, the producer and Ed walked into the reception area to say their goodbyes. The producer went back inside, Ed Koch looked from me, to Connie, to Keith, said, "Well, good-bye." We said "Bye, Ed" in unison and then it was showtime. After the taping Connie and I went on an even-seamier-underside tour of Greenwich Village pubs, but decided to pack it in around 2:30 thus proving that we are neither of us kids anymore. Friday, Jim Hanley came by for a nice lunch before the signing at his *Jim Hanley's Universe* store on 32nd St. Ger and I ended up at a table near the front door and since I had been fighting a fever (pub crawls being known to play havoc with one's immune system) by the time we hit the four hour mark, I was feeling decidedly spacy around the edges. I called a hall at that point and arranged to meet Jim and his staff and Ger back at the hotel. I made it through dinner, even as the wallpaper was starting to move about in strange patterns. I think I slept about twelve hours that night and the next day Ger and I headed over to Staten Island to the other *Jim Hanley's Universe* and this time a for-real signing, verging on six hours. Jim took us all out for a great dinner at *LaScala* (laScala that was to die for) and then drove us back upstate. Up early the next day for the Great Eastern show at the Penn Station Hotel (PEnnsylvania-5000 has a much nicer ring to it than the *Ramada*, which is what they have posted now), 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. this time instead of the usual 10 to 4. I don't know how we did it. The line never seemed to get any shorter. Self-publishing allies Colleen (A Distant Soil) Doran and Jo (Nestorber) Duffy were there as well. It would've been nice to have had dinner with them, but we were flying out that night, so no such luck. Jo has promised to send me a *Nestorber* segment for *Cerebus* Preview, though. One final, glorious careening, lurching, stopping, starting, whiplash-level g-force New York-fucking-outta-my-way-asshole-City cab ride to LaGuardia (I think we tipped the guy ten bucks which was cheap at twice the price) and it was twenty-two cities down, two to go.

CEREBUS

NO. 165

DECEMBER 1992

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

**MOTHERS
&
DAUGHTERS**
a novel

BOOK ONE
(*Cerebus* 151 to
Cerebus 162)
Flight

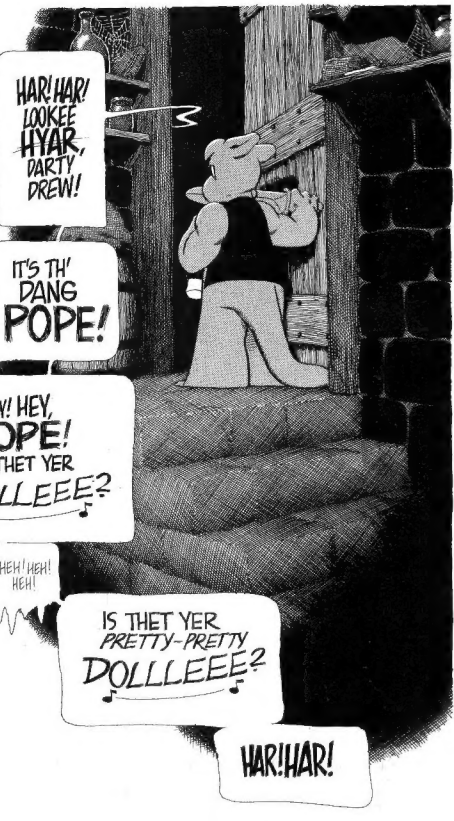
BOOK TWO
(*Cerebus* 163 to
Cerebus 174)
Women

BOOK THREE
(*Cerebus* 175 to
Cerebus 188)

BOOK FOUR
(*Cerebus* 189 to
Cerebus 200)

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HAR! HAR!
LOOKEE
HYAR,
PARTY
DREW!

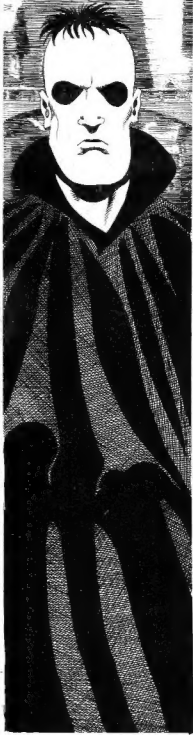
IT'S TH'
DANG
POPE!

HEY! HEY,
POPE!
IS THET YER
DOLLEEE?

HEH! HEH!
HEH!

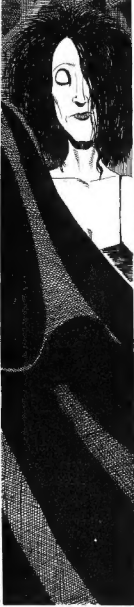
IS THET YER
PRETTY-PRETTY
DOLLLEEE?

WAR! HAR!



a great
battle is
imminent...

Its
outcome
uncertain
...



the
survival
of
\$WOON
country
depends
on you,
my
sister
\$Nuff



you
will
need
hundreds
of semi
automatic
cross-
bows
...



when
you
lead the
defense
of our
realm
...



killing
...all...
who
attempt
to
invade
...



'til the
streets run
red with
Girrinist
blood...

AND
WHUT--

OH
SAY...

WHUT
ARE YOU
ALL
GONN'T I'
BE DOIN'?

I...?

I shall
stand around
looking...

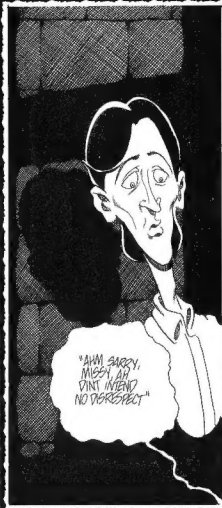
moody.

And feeling
...sorry
for
myself.

WHOA!

UN-- OH SON--
UNHAND
YO' TESTICLES
THERE, SON

...AND RUN
THAT BY
ME AGAIN?!



FIRST, MY KNOW-
IT-ALL-WISE-GUY
EVIL TWIN DISAPPEARS

WITHOUT
EXPLANATION
OR APOLOGY...

NOW, I FIND
MYSELF STRIPPED
OF MY DIGNIFIED
ROBES OF OFFICE;
MY HAND-STITCHED
PATENT LEATHER SHOES
WITH THE CALF-SKIN
INSOLES; MY THREE-
PIECE CUSTOM-MADE
DARK GRAY-ON-NAY
PIN-STRIPED DOUBLE-
BREASTED SUIT
WITH HAND-WOVEN
GOLD AND BURGUNDY
SILK LINING

MY GOLD THREAD,
CREAM-COLOURED
ONE HUNDRED PER
CENT (LIGHTLY-
STARCHED) CUFFS
AND COLLAR;
COTTON DESIGNER
LABEL SHIRT;
MY MOTHER-OF-
PEARL AND
RED GOLD
HAND-TOOLED
CUFF-LINKS
AND MATCHING
TIE PIN; MY
BLACK SILK
AND COTTON
BLEND NECK
TIE WITH
CRUSHED
VELVET
LINING

AGAIN!...

WITHOUT
EXPLANATION
OR APOLOGY...

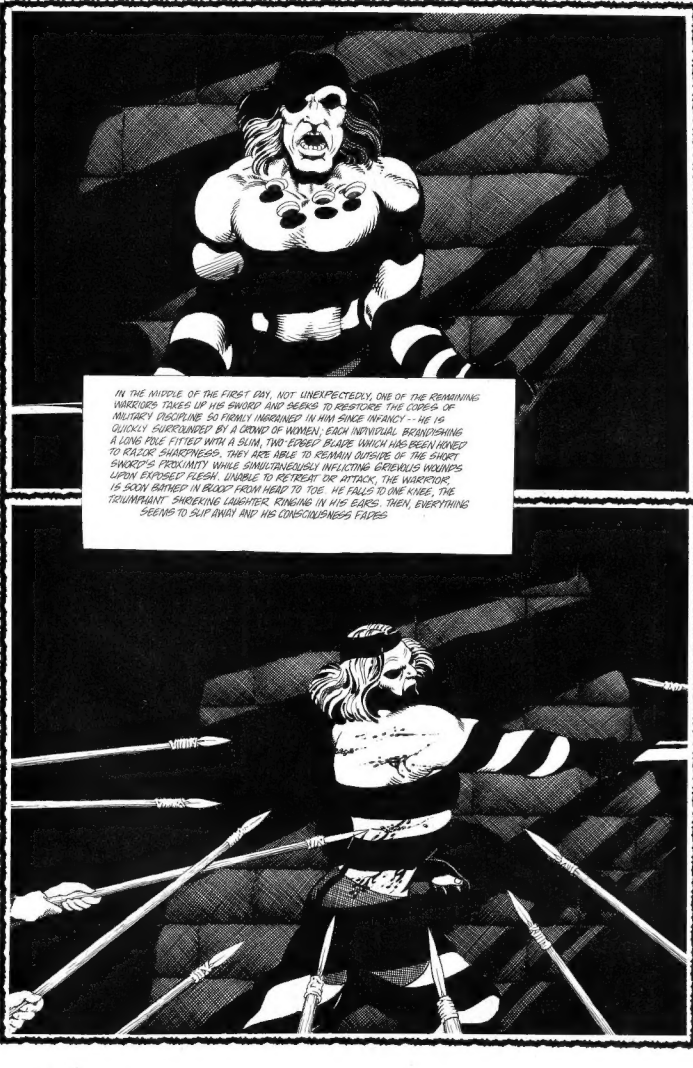
FAILING

THAT WHATEVER
MALIGNANT AND
UNBORN FORCE
IS AT WORK HERE
SHOULD DEIGN
TO PROFFER AN
EXPLANATION

WOULD THAT
FORCE AT
LEAST OFFER
SOME EVIDENCE
THAT THESE
UNPROVOKED
AND UNEXPLAINED
ATTACKS UPON
MY DIGNITY
ARE NOW AT
AN END

AM I
CORRECT IN
INTERPRETING
THIS AS A
DEFINITE
"NO"?





IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRST DAY, NOT UNEXPECTEDLY, ONE OF THE REMAINING WARRIORS TAKES UP HIS SWORD AND SEEMS TO RESTORE THE CODES OF MILITARY DISCIPLINE SO FIRMLY IMBAINED IN HIM SINCE INFANCY -- HE IS QUICKLY SURROUNDED BY A CROWD OF WOMEN; EACH INDIVIDUAL BRANDISHING A LONG POLE FITTED WITH A SLIM, TWO-EDGED BLADE WHICH HAS BEEN HONED TO RAZOR SHARPNESS. THEY ARE ABLE TO REMAIN OUTSIDE OF THE SHORT SWORD'S PROXIMITY WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY INFLECTING GRIEVOUS WOUNDS UPON EXPOSED FLESH. UNABLE TO RETREAT OR ATTACK, THE WARRIOR, IS SOON BATHED IN BLOOD FROM HEAD TO TOE. HE FALLS TO ONE KNEE, THE TRIUMPHANT SNEERING LAUGHTER RINGING IN HIS EARS. THEN, EVERYTHING SEEMS TO SLIP AWAY AND HIS CONSCIOUSNESS FADES



JUST
ASK
FORGIVENESS

CURIN IS
VERY
FORGIVING
OF HUMAN
ERROR



YOU
COULD
BE A GREAT
FORCE FOR
GOOD?

EVEN
NOW!



DO YOU
UNDERSTAND
WHAT I'M
SAYING...?



SHE'S
LOST
ALREADY

AND
SHE KNOWS
IT..

AYE

WHAT
WAS
THAT?

NOTHING

JUST
THINKING
OUT LOUD!



General Greer:
Well, we don't know. We have the transcript from Vera and we know he's in the tavern.

Cirrin:
You're certain of that.

General Greer:
Yes. Well, yes and no. We've only observed him in limited interaction with others, so there's a real possibility that he's just an illusion.

General Dworkin:
We have our best-equipped troops stationed there, now, so he can't take us by surprise this time. They're heavily armoured so his sword won't do him much good if he isn't an illusion.

General Greer:
Then there's the doll.

General Dworkin:
Oh, yes. I almost forgot. He's holding a doll, which no one mentioned during the last . . . sighting. A plain rag doll.

Cirrin:
A doll.

General Greer:
Yes, we think it might be a provocative gesture on the part of the illusionists, since it is obviously a maternal symbol. Of course if he's real and he's still a Kevillist, the symbolism is even more significant in that he's holding it in a protective manner and he's already forced one of the tavern residents to pay homage to it.

Cirrin:
Homage to a maternal symbol. That doesn't sound like a Kevillist.

General Dworkin:
No, it doesn't; which leads us back to the illusionists. Someone even suggested that he might have come over to our side.

General Greer:
That's pretty far-fetched.

General Dworkin:
I agree. It's so unexpected and confusing that it would seem to point to illusionism.

General Greer:
Or Lord Julius. It's the sort of thing he would come up with. Maybe they're still connected in some way.

Cirrin:
A maternal symbol. And he's not doing anything?

General Greer:
Just sitting and drinking an ale.

Cirrin:
Unbelievable. It must mean something.

General Greer:
Do you want us to go in and get him?

Cirrin:
No. The Alcohol Sanction shouldn't be violated. The illusionists are just trying to provoke us into breaking our own rules so they can use it to fuel an insurgency.

General Greer:
He's murdered a number of mothers, though. Soldiers.

General Dworkin:
He's an illusion. He has to be. If he isn't, how do you explain the doll?

Cirrin:
We'll leave him there for the time being. Monitor his conversations. Wait the illusionists out. They're getting careless. The ascension is at hand. There's no way they can stop it at this point. They're just trying to break our concentration.

General Greer:
Yes. Yes, of course. That must be it.



THE
KIDEE HAD
BEEN
...KIDNEY

IT ADDED UP
TO THE LADLE
AND THE VENTS
AND YOU CAN
SEE WEY
SMALLER

AND THE
OVEN
BECOMES
LARGER
UNDERNEATH

ONCE THE AIR
IS SUPER HEATED
THE PRESSURE
FORCES THE
MOLTEN GOLD
FORWARD
AND ...



WE STARTED TO
DESIGN AN
AIR-TIGHT BONNET
FOR THE LADLE

AND THEN WE
REALIZED THAT
WE COULD
ELIMINATE
THE LADLE
ENTIRELY...

WITH THE SYSTEM
OF LOCKS WITHIN
THE EXTENDED
FORCE, THE
PROBLEMS OF
KEEPING THE
GOLD LIQUID
AND
ELIMINATING
IMPLURITIES
ARE SOLVED
WITH A
SINGLE
MODIFICATION

IT'S
INGENIOUS

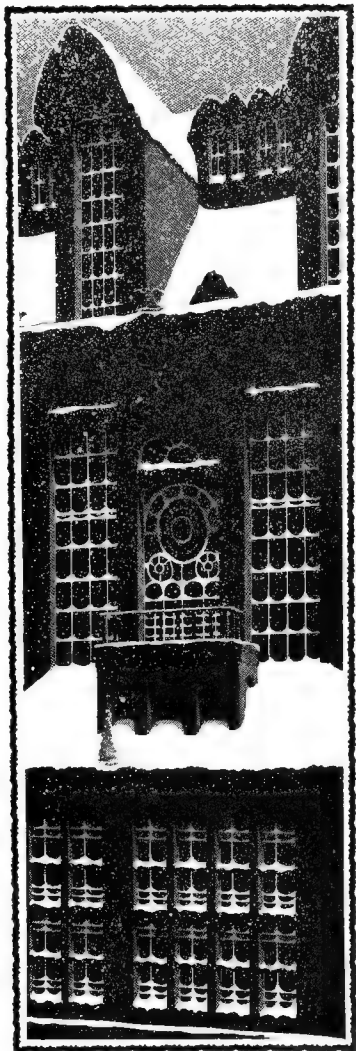


AND WHICH
OF YOUR
STAFF
CAME UP
WITH THIS?



NO
ONE

THAT'S THE
EXTRAORDINARY
THING - IT WAS
ALL HALF-
CONSTRUCTED
IN SKELETAL
FORM WHEN
WE GOT HERE
THIS MORNING



Mrs. Hayes:
Mrs. Thatcher is down there now
with Hammond.

Cirin:
It has to be an illusion. Things
don't construct themselves
like that.

Mrs. Mills:
The designers are beside
themselves. You know all of the
qualifying they were doing about
the purity of the sphere? Ninety
percent . . . ninety-five per cent.
They aren't qualifying it any
more. It makes me suspicious.

Mrs. Hayes:
It's ironic — we kept telling them
that they could do it and make it
one hundred percent pure and
they were the ones who were
doubtful. Now they're confident
that it can be done and we're the
ones with doubts.

Cirin:
We just have to trust that the
Goddess is guiding the
construction.

Mrs. Hayes:
But if it's the illusionists —
if the expanded forge isn't really
there . . .

Mrs. Mills:
It's just a skeleton of wood; one
step beyond a blueprint, really.
If the principle is sound; and all
of the designers and technicians
say it is; then it doesn't matter if
the skeleton is an illusion. The
forge itself will be real.

Mrs. Hayes:
But what if the principle is an
illusion? I never understood the
mechanics of it in the first place.
What would prevent the
illusionists from making the
technicians see some miraculous
new construction idea that is
fundamentally unsound?

Mrs. Mills:
The fact that it's two elements
instead of three worries me. First,
we needed a mold, a forge and a
ladle. Now they're telling us that
the ladle is unnecessary. Three
elements constitute a queen.
Two elements is a priestess.

Cirin:
Unstable.

Mrs. Mills:
It's so Astoria, it squeaks.

Cirin:
You forgot the gold itself.
That means it was four elements
before; mold, forge, ladle and
gold. A king. Now it's three
elements; mold, forge and gold.

Mrs. Mills:
Praise the Goddess.

Cirin:
Doubt is going to be our greatest
foe as the ascension approaches.
We must trust in the Goddess
absolutely.

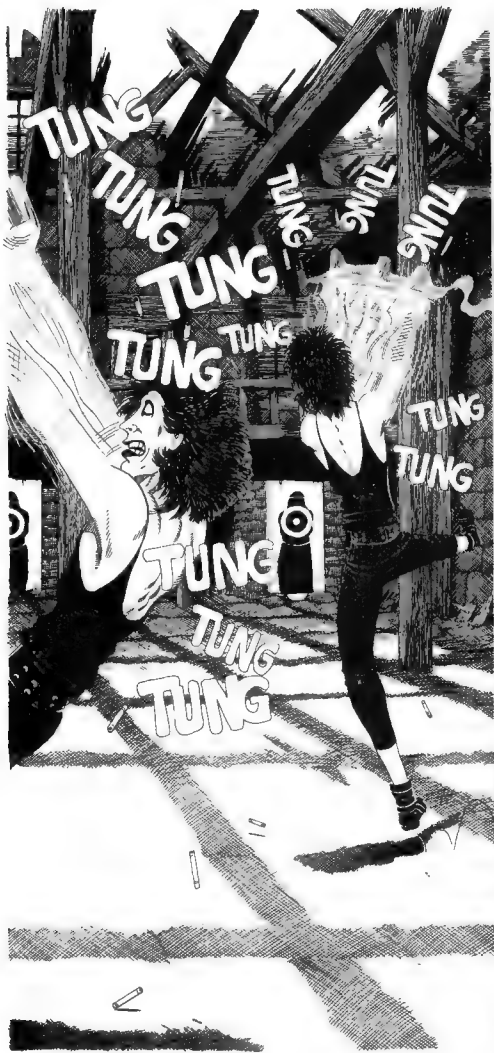
Mrs. Hayes:
Yes, Great Cirin. Of course,
you're right.

We will begin with basic target practice

Hold the
weapon
in front
of you.

11

Do
not pull
the trigger.
Squeeze
it.





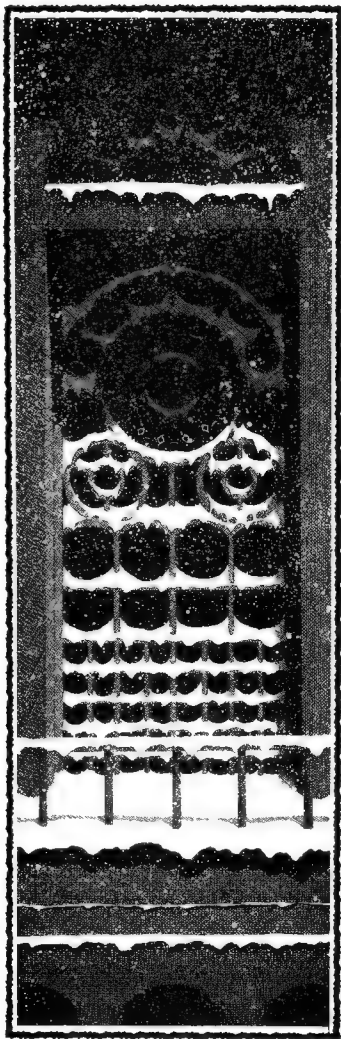
The Alcohol Sanction is called into question frequently by many sincere followers of our creed. It falls into the same category as prostitution in our view. That which cannot be eliminated must be sequestered. The consumption of alcohol, once isolated from the general community, permits those self-destructive and troublesome elements within the male population to hasten their own demise. Since no one is permitted to leave a licensed establishment until entirely sober, each tavern becomes an effective prison to those unable or unwilling to forego inebriation as a state of perpetual existence. If a husband is absent for three consecutive days owing to intoxication, his marriage is automatically dissolved and his possessions seized and distributed for the general benefit of his own and other needy families. He then becomes a tavern "resident", provided with alcohol and a subsistence diet and mean accommodation for the rest of his days. The average life expectancy of one of these individuals is six to eight months. Indisputably, wives find the enforced separation to be a great trial, but in a majority of cases, they will choose their subsequent life-mate with greater care and less emotion, and will find a reliable provider for themselves and their children.

Cirin
The New Matriarchy



One of the few matriarchal programs with which I heartily concur is the Alcohol Sanction. It should be noted that the Sanction was devised only when a general prohibition proved completely unworkable. I do feel, however, that the taverns should be accessible to the general female population, as well. Illicit consumption of alcohol among homemakers, the trading of sexual favours for smuggled alcohol, as well as a proliferation of illegal distillation in Upper Felde's kitchens, is glossed over to an unconscionable degree. Alcoholism is destructive of societal progress wherever it occurs and the sooner the vice can be bred out of every aspect of male and female existence, the sooner true and meaningful progress can be achieved.

Astoria
Kevillist Origins



General Greer:

First, the signs have been changed from "Roachland" to "Swoon Country". Again, we have no idea what that means.

General Dworkin:

We've been able to scan nothing of Skull man. As per our discussions late last night, we decided to send in a reconnaissance group over the rooftops. There's a young woman who seems to have the same kind of weapons that Skull man used on the first assault team.

Clrin:

A woman?

General Dworkin:

Yes. Very young; wearing the sacred symbol. Dressed entirely in black. We tried to monitor her thoughts and drew a blank.

Clrin:

She's screening, then?

General Dworkin:

Evidently.

Clrin:

Kevillist?

General Dworkin:

That would be our best guess. We have no idea how she knew our people were on the roof, but she took them all out with pinpoint accuracy. Twenty dead.

Clrin:

Dead are confirmed?

General Greer:

Yes. No chance of it being an illusion.

General Dworkin:

She has a companion. A large man in black robes. Both are described as extremely pale-skinned. We haven't been able to scan him either. Except for one word. "Blossom".

Clrin:

Sounds like an ascension reference.

General Greer:

Blossom. Exactly.

General Dworkin:

I'd like to recommend an all-out assault, but at this point it would be highly inadvisable. First, we don't know where Skull man is hiding and we have to assume he's still there and fully armed. And we have no idea at this point who else is down there.

Clrin:

So your recommendation is . . . ?

General Dworkin:

Hold the perimeter as we've been doing, but bring in some cross-bows and make it a little more secure; sand-bags, pike and what-not. We're still not letting anyone in, but we'd like to make sure that they don't break out of the confined area.

Clrin:

Yes. Immediately.
Good thinking.

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

*Ivan Brunetti has asked me to let everyone know that **Misery Loves Comedy #2** is now available. #1 is out of print and he got orders for only thirty copies from his Capital solicitation. \$10.95 post paid to Paisano Publishing, 5110 S. Hyde Park Blvd., #1, Chicago, Illinois, USA 60615.*

Dear Dave,

So what could I do? Larry Young calls me from California the other day, berating me for not staying in touch. Then I find out he's not even in L.A. anymore, that he's move northward to San Francisco. Thanks for telling me, Lar! So he sent me a cool t-shirt, so what? Well . . . I guess that sort of balances out his whole "who's bigger" attitude. And he's hung out with Brian Hibbs and talked comics so things can't be all bad, I suppose. But he asked me to avoid mentioning Rob and/or Nicole (who is very polite on the phone, by the way) in this letter, so I won't.

Anyway, it's eight months later and I still haven't thanked you for coming to Pittsburgh. I tried to say hi at the Diamond Seminar, but almost wasn't able to because I was told that you were "far too busy doing head sketches to actually talk to anyone." Really! And here I thought that the whole point of the seminar was to meet with creators and publishers to find out how to better promote and sell more of their books. Silly me. I just wanted to let you know that my in-store subscriptions to *Cerebus* have doubled! Okay, okay, so they've gone from a very modest four to a still very modest eight, but I think that's pretty cool. One of my best customers (and former Marvel zombie), David Hobbs, walked into the store a couple of weeks ago with all of his X-stuff, plopped it on the counter,

and said "I don't want this stuff anymore. It sucks. Cancel them off my list and add *Sandman* and *Cerebus*." Then he took the credit he got for the mutant books and picked up all of the phone books and all of the *Sandman* trade paperbacks. Damn cool. (I finally did get to say hello at the seminar, but not after a good bit of trouble. If we ever meet again, I'll tell you all about it, suffice to say that I was pretty ticked off at the time.)

As for ordering "rules" that you mentioned in the letters page of #163, I think it's the responsibility of the comic retailers out there to use the profits generated by Marvel, DC, Image, or whatever else is "hot", and channel them into comics with quality and substance. Let's face it, we really can't get hurt by ordering one less X-book and one more *Cerebus*, *Bone*, *Xenozoic Tales*, or whatever. In the long run, we probably end up ahead of the game. (On a side note, though no one seems to believe me, *Milk & Cheese* outsells every monthly DC and is catching up on the middle-tier Marvels here at the *Time Tunnel*. Just an interesting aside.)

Well, I hope that the next time you do a big tour, you'll stop back in Pittsburgh (bad experiences notwithstanding). Maybe by that time I'll be able to tell you that my *Cerebus* subs have tripled or quadrupled. Until then, take it easy.

Sincerely,

Patrick Donley

(P.S. to Larry Young — Get a job, Romeo.)

I hope to get back to Pittsburgh in the future, but I do owe it to Philadelphia to get back there first. I try to talk with everyone at signings, but that's becoming difficult. There is obviously a pressing need for more dialogue at the Trade Shows, but no structure that will really facilitate it. Suggestions?

Dear Dave,

After that whole L.A. thing, I thought maybe San Francisco would be a little more fun. I mean, Lynne (Rob's redhead) is here as well as Nicole (of fabled song and story).

Well, after five weeks in the greater Metropolitan Bay area, I can tell you this: Nicole is impressively intelligent and heart-stoppingly attractive, but now I know why Rob Lavender broke up with her.

Let's just leave it at that, shall we?

Later,

Larry Young
1578 Fell Street, #4
San Francisco, CA
USA 94117

Oh, sure. Leave us all hanging why don't you.

★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

It is Fall now, and here in the mountains the leaves have turned suddenly, blazing up with fierce red and brilliant orange. Contrary to the old cliché, Spring is not the time when men turn their thoughts to Love. Rather, October is when men fall in love or come to realise that they love.

The leaves turn and fall down, down in the rains that come in October, down with the raindrops that we stare out into, stare out into the night, holding our coffee and cigarettes in still hands, staring out into the rainy night and communicating with each other in those long quiet pauses more effectively than we ever could by speaking. My coffee, hot, steaming hot and rich and sweet, driving out the night's chill, and my cigarettes, bitter, acrid, a vice that I only indulge in at work or with my friends when we bullsh*t far into the night down at the dive after the sacred ginmill has closed. Dave, oh my Dave, we bullsh*t there, down at the dive, talking of movies and the lost art of the cinema, speaking of those who have gone before us, old friends and old enemies, and, yes, we speak of lost loves and current loves. We speak of love there, in that cold darkness, and we drink our coffee and we smoke.

But, there are some things that I can not discuss with my friends that I can tell y'all about.

Not about the other woman. Let's go further back than that. Let's

talk about the fateful Sunday night when my wife came rolling in late. Not about what she said but about my anger.

Gads, but I was angry. Angry? I was enraged. I wanted to pummel her with my fists. I wanted to scream and rant and rave. I wanted to cry. I felt like descending upon her like a wild animal and use my teeth to rip her throat out, to drink her blood and smear my body with it. I was so close to violence that ...

Instead, I gave vent in another way. I used my wife sexually in a brutal manner. It was if I could smell this other guy on her and like a dog marking its territory. I had to fuck her, to put my scent on her, to mark as mine, once and for all, this woman.

And I did. I made it last as long as I could, an hour, two hours, I don't remember. Not out of pleasure, not out of need, but out of rage. I put my anger into the act and, when I was through it was as if I was saying "There. Go to this other guy now and let him smell you. You're marked as mine and he will run away after sensing this boundary. And you know it. You know now that you are mine and always will be."

And my wife knew that was what I was doing. She as much as told me so later, reassuring me that though I had hurt her a little, she had enjoyed it.

Me? It bothers me now and then. It bothers me that I would do something like that to someone that I love. It says something about me that isn't too pretty.

So.

K-Man

Owning a woman is like owning a cat; an act of self-deception bordering on schizophrenia.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave & Gerhard,

Greetings from Samaria!! (or "Occupied West Bank", if such is your politics.) I'm wrapping up a four month visit to The Land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I thought I'd drop you a line.

Question: Can *Cerebus* make it out this far? Answer: Yes it can if you're determined enough. I was here for about two months before I began getting "homesick" for new and back issues, so I called the states and requested a care-package. A box of 153-158 arrived a month ago, along with (for me)

new issues 159 & 160 (and *Xenozoic Tales* and some art supplies) and I spent a very satisfying afternoon catching up on things. A box with 161 & 162 is due to arrive any day now and I'm looking forward to that!

If you want your discriminating pick of comics, you have to operate along these lines because there are only TWO comic stores that service the entire country!! And the very small market coupled with almost non-existent competition means that these places can run things their own way rather than the customer's way.

Still, even a mediocre comics store is better than no store at all for people like me who like to buy and window shop. So for interested *Cerebus* readers, the comic stores of Israel are:

KATZMAN — located at 152 or 154 Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv. I've been in some bathrooms that are bigger, but he carries Marvels, DCs, and Independents. I found *Cerebus* #110 & 152 here, in a pile of independents. The owner claims that he has his books flown in by air from the U.S. every few months, and as a result prices are high. He'll check the price in the guide and charge you six shekels to the (U.S.) dollar. So, to buy #152 there, listed in the guide at \$2.50, I paid 15 shekels, or about \$6.00 U.S.

POST SCRIPT — 5 Eliezzar Jaffa St., Rannana (opposite Wendy's). Phone (05) 2-918-310. He just opened, claims to have better prices than Katzman, but claims to carry only Marvels and DCs.

SEFER VE SEFEL — On Ya-avetz St., 20 feet from the corner of Ya-avetz and Jaffa streets. That corner is between Zion Square and King George St., two key landmarks in Jerusalem. They don't carry new comics, but have a mixed assortment in some bins in a corner. They also have a nice selection of paperbacks, including SF. Hey, where else could I have picked up a copy of *New Mutants* #21 for 4 shekels?

Much thanks to William C. Stennis for writing the impassioned, yet objective letter that was printed in #160. Very refreshing to hear from someone else who can think clearly when all about you have abandoned their minds.

New topic: possible errors cropping up in the book:

A. Shouldn't the dialogue in 160 pg. 10 read, "King's bishop to

Queen's bishop Four"?

B. Wasn't Posey sentenced to five years of hard labor, rather than the two years claimed by Suentius Po? Careful, now.

C. What does it mean to 'Frog-march' someone?

Best,

Larry Dudock
P.O. Box 217 Eli
D.N. Ephraim Israel
(U.S. address:)
9 Cornwallis Road
Setavket, NY USA 11733

P.S. I'm pleased to recommend an intelligent new book about Israel and the problems of the Middle-East. It's called, *A Place Among The Nations. Israel And The World*, by Benjamin Netanyahu (whom most Westerners "met" on CNN during the Gulf War). It's due to be published in March of 1993. Netanyahu is a rare thing: a politician with something valuable to say. His well-documented book refutes many common myths about the Middle-East, and lays the base for what is needed to achieve peace in the region.

Larry was the second last person in line at the New York Con and I just wasn't up to answering questions at that point so I promised I would answer them here

A. An instance of matriachal gravitational pull. See page 6 this issue.

B. That would certainly blow holes in the supposition that Po is omniscient wouldn't it?

C. Forced marching in a crouched position usually with the arms bound.

Sorry I ran out of steam at the New York Con before you could grill me, Larry.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I enjoyed meeting and talking to you this October when you came out to Arizona. I had wanted to give you some pages of a comic I was working on, but at the time there was a heated (and very entertaining) discussion going on about your recent feud with Gary Groth and I forgot all about it. So it goes.

Anyways, I have since finished and published my comic and this time I wanted to make sure you saw it. It's called *Pheniribe* and it collects most of my one page strips I've done over the past year. I hope you like it.

Incidentally, I am about to plunge in (for the first time) and read all of the *Cerebus* phone books. I am really looking forward to it. It's bad news for the comic book business, however. I won't have to go to a comic book store for the next six months.

Sincerely,

Eric Searleman
350 W. Hazelwood St.
Phoenix, Arizona
USA 85013

Well, it was your wife who picked the fight with me, Eric. And after she was nice enough to write an article on me for the Arizona Republic. I enjoyed Phenicrabe very much. Thanks for sending it along. Oh, here comes your wife, now.

Dear Dave,

A belated note to thank you for the *Cerebus* phone books and for the stimulating conversation at *Atomic Comics*. I didn't mean to put you on the spot. Actually, I felt pretty lousy after I left the store, like: Why did I do that? And I also felt bad that we *did* have a good interview but I used so little of it — I apologize to you again for that. I look forward to reading *Cerebus* past, present and future. I give myself a year or so for the phone books. (I have to go to work and eat every now and then.) Thanks again and good luck with your work and the tour.

Sincerely,

Penelope Corcoran
350 West Hazelwood St.
Phoenix, Arizona
USA 85013

P.S. How 'bout those Blue Jays?

Well, we disagree on the extent to which store owners are obligated to make marginal black and white books sell, but you are at least open-minded enough to go to bat for *Cerebus* with a major daily newspaper when you hadn't read the book. That counts for a great deal with me; keeping debate active and alive while continuing to work together for the betterment of the medium.

Dear Dave,

I'm reading the *Comics Journal* and see your name mentioned as potentially writing a *Spawn* story.

I sigh and shake my head.

But then my wise older brother says "Just think of the exposure it would get them" (you and the other cats mentioned; Moore, Miller...).

Days later on the way home from school my lil' ol' brain goes: "Hm. If every *Cerebus* reader picked up that issue... no. Too unlikely... if half of the *Cerebus* readers picked up that *Spawn* (feeling ill as they did so) it would hardly be a bump on *Spawn's* sales. If one percent of *Spawn's* readers thought 'Hey, that was cool, I'll check out *Cerebus*,' it would increase sales by... like half or something."

Mindboggling. Scary. Sickening.

But if it's true, I can sort of understand or something.

Simply,

Jason Turner

(Also, did your and Chester Brown's thing ever get done and if yes, will we ever see it?)

The untitled jam story Chester and I are doing is "in progress" but was put on hold for the duration of the Tour. I'm looking forward to getting back to it.

The mainstream fans aren't so bad. Take this guy for instance:

Dear Dave,

The Everyfanfave Roach plus the Albino Chicken sidekick leads to hilarious one-panel parodies that are iron-clad lawsuit proof. It doesn't get any better than this. Double-bag, acid-free backing board, safety deposit box, Mile High pristine mint that is!

I am one of those Marvel Zombies, shamelessly shambling twice a week to my local comics shop (Hi to Wayne at *Heroes & Hitlers* who does his part to promote *Cerebus*, on the off chance that this should see print) to buy nearly all of Marvel's output. But if I could read just one comic it would be X-oops-just-kidding, *Cerebus*.

Thanks for the monthly classic and better living through mylar!

Bill Hall
556 Main Street
Cromwell, CT
USA 06416

Thanks, Bill. Thanks, Wayne. And then, of course, there's Travis...

Dear Dave,

I'm writing to tell you your comic is the best I've read other comics but *CEREBUS* IS DEFINITELY THE BEST. Your art is great as is your story telling skills. I have not read the first 7 chapters of *Mothers and Daughters* but I have read *Melmoth* and *Jaka's Story*. I was attracted to *Cerebus* by the advertisement in *Spawn* #3 and 4. The idea to create a comic based on the ups and downs of a hero sounded good to me. So I went to the comic store and bought the *Jaka's Story* issues. I fell in love with *Cerebus* with the first panel. I went back to the comic store and bought all the *Melmoth* issues. I am now trying to get the *Church and State* issues. I am dedicated to *Cerebus* till issue #300. You will probably get more letters from me but for now I must say goodbye.

Sincerely,

Travis Sumner
1211 45th St. West
Bradenton, FL
USA 34209

Thanks, Travis. Thanks, Toddmeister. What do you say? Just about time for an in-depth letter about the story-line?

Dear Dave,

Help me out here. This was supposed to be a letter of criticism, seeing as how I picked up *Cerebus* 162, the last part of 'Flight', about a week ago, and I've spent most of the time since then in bed with the flu, going through those issues and trying to see what I could make of the story so far.

At first, I thought to myself, "Let's just go through it a page at a time and see what occurs to me as each page comes up." Would you believe I got stuck on page one? The verses that start the book. Looking at these, I thought of a saying, about wisdom beginning with the words "I don't know." Whoever said that, I'm so glad they did because I haven't the faintest idea what to make of these words or what their significance should be.

So then I thought, "Okay, why don't I just see if I can identify some plot strands, see if there is anything worthwhile I can pull from that." I had a little more success with this.

As far as I can tell, the events of this novel are precipitated by the actions of Cirin and *Cerebus*. I'll

deal with Cerebus later; the first major character we come across is Cirin. She is 'purging the Papal Library of unwanted works' — burning books. The fate of the demon Khem is linked with this action by the Melodramatic Narrator, so I assume the book-burning is the cause of the various mysterious events, including the death of Death, the strange behaviour of those coins and that flower in the River, the mountain suddenly sprouting an enormous... whatever it was in front of Mrs. Thatcher, the doubles of the Judge and the Elf (although I have a feeling that these last two relate to other matters as well) and the appearance and abrupt disappearance of the Pig god. Cirin is totally unaffected by any of these events (so far). She has her own agenda, but I have a feeling that the events she has set in motion here will catch up with her somehow. What goes around comes around.

A more immediate issue is that of the internecine struggles within Cirin's occupational force. Cirin has isolated herself in the Papal Library, seeking we know not what (but we can guess — judging from her dreams, she seeks guidance with regard to the 'one true Ascension'), and while she devotes her time to this pursuit, those under her nominal leadership appear to be free to do as they please. General Swartskof disregards a direct command to take Cerebus prisoner and orders his execution. Mrs. Coppes orders the size of the sphere increased, against Cirin's wishes — a small-minded woman, she assumes too much self-importance and when she is found out, accuses her accuser of her own crime. And Thatcher — she knows that knowledge is power. Witness her actions, or lack of them, when she finds out something of which Cirin is unaware.

Of course, this all gets back to Cirin. Doubts assail her. I think the beginning of her problems is when she realizes that Cerebus is still alive, he did not die when 'the illusion-tower vanished'. The thought must have crossed her mind — did he actually ascend? And if he did, does that not then indicate that the God is male? She begins to have nightmares about it. The apparent schisms among her followers fuel paranoia. But she does not know what to do. She begins to feel the need to discuss matters with Astoria, make Astoria

tell her about Cerebus — isn't that interesting? Perhaps Cirin realizes she has become too set in her ways, that her own convictions blinker her to the right course of action. She needs a fresh perspective, which raises another question. Astoria has another perspective, on which she founded Kevillism, a perspective which opposes Cirinism. *Whatever* Astoria has to say, Cirin won't like it. In the meantime, Cirin carries on regardless as the emergencies pile up.

Astoria herself is re-emerging as a major player. From what we see in 'Flight', it seems a pretty fair guess to say that the Big Round Glowing White Strange Thing is a manifestation of Suenteus Po's consciousness. It hasn't escaped my notice that when Po moves people around, small images of them appear to others. Cerebus appears to Astoria, Cirin and Beth as he moves through the spheres (which raises interesting questions about Beth, considering she appears to be merely an artist's model). Astoria appeared to Cerebus in the same manner way back in 'Sacred Wars', so this tends to indicate that she is one of Po's chess pieces, just as Cerebus is. By the way, isn't it interesting that all the characters' actions are ritualised into games — Diamondback, a card game, for those on Earth, and Chess, a board game, for Suenteus Po in the eighth sphere? So Astoria is one of Po's pieces, and Po is opposed to Cirin, yet Cirin desires conversation with Astoria. Hmm. It also transpires that Astoria is the leader of the 'Eye in the Pyramid', the underground group that's been troubling Lord Julius since before the Palnu Trilogy. It makes sense; Julius got rid of Astoria so she had to infiltrate Palnu by other means. Anyway, it turns out that the 'Eye in the Pyramid' is another group of fat, ugly women. That makes them perfect for infiltration into the Cirinists, and, from Astoria's conversation with her guard, that's exactly what has happened. It raises the possibility that some of the characters with whom we are already familiar are members. Coppes? Perhaps even Thatcher? Who knows?

Also related to the actions of the Cirinists is the emergence of the common Iestans as a force in the novel. There have been references to them in previous novels, but this is the first time they have been given a voice, or voices of their own. The first thing that comes to

light is the fact that they hate the Cirinists, men and women alike.

There's an interesting point being made here, and a worthwhile one. If an oppressed minority actually manages to bring themselves to power, then by God, you can be sure the erstwhile oppressors will be dealt a twofold taste of their own oppression. Furthermore, Cirin was supposedly bringing enlightened government to Iest, but look at the way she contains news of Cerebus' reappearance: she cordons off the area and has everyone who isn't a mother executed — even Cirinists (I don't know if anyone else noticed that diamond-shaped word balloon). If that's enlightened government, you can keep it. The word-of-mouth sequences in the dark emphasize one thing — the masses cannot make up their mind — a point that Suenteus Po makes to Cerebus; the people are no good.

If the people cannot make up their mind, then surely they need someone to do it for them. In comes the Punisheroach. Here's a good bit of character development. Normalroach becomes Punisheroach after overhearing a mental conversation between Cirin and Swartskof. He reacts to it in characteristic fashion, that is to say, he overreacts. Becoming Punisheroach and swearing loyalty to Cerebus, who he sees as Tarim personified, the Cootie offs all the Cirinists in the area and sets up Roachland. Then, while trying to keep everything under control, and after shooting a woman who had ambitions to be his queen, he begins to get distracted by thoughts of sex. Enter Elrod. It seems to me that Elrod uses quite a lot of energy getting past the Cirinist barriers and finding the Cootie. Once he finds the Roach, he then proceeds to fuel the Roach's lustful thoughts, eventually taking him to a knocking shop and getting him laid. One has to wonder about Elrod's reasons for getting involved in this. It seems highly likely that Elrod has his own plans. Certainly his scheme with the Roach seems to have been to get him to give up his religious fervour for Cerebus, but all he in fact manages is to get the Roach infatuated with a prostitute. Nice one, Elrod.

The Pigts are finally doing something, actually getting up and marching on Iest at last. Interesting to see that their god *almost* joins them, but upon Cerebus' descent, he returns to Earth. Coincidence? I doubt it.

All of which brings me to Cerebus himself.

Up until *Mothers and Daughters*, we have seen Cerebus suffer a series of defeats. First he loses his political position, then he loses the woman he loves, first to another male, then to his successors in politics. For a while, he also loses the will to live. It is only when he is set upon by the Cirinists that he realizes that he *does* want to live after all. The events of this book seem to be setting him up for the next part of his life, teaching him what he needs to know. The first thing he learns is that the people are no damn good. He can't use them to oust the Cirinists, because the Cirinists are just too good for them. He only escapes from that disaster alive because Suenteus Po pulls his ass out of the fire.

In the Seventh Sphere, Cerebus concentrates on going 'up'. He lets nothing stop him, not those "capricious" aspects of Po's character (or are they false Pos? What was that about the fake Regency Elf? Cerebus knew the false Elf was an attempt to manipulate him right from the start. Is he suggesting that Po was behind it? Questions, questions), nor the recollection of previous joys, nor the revelation that the Judge lied to him about his future (probably because Cerebus doesn't really believe this. You said yourself, Cerebus is willfully self-destructive). He goes 'up' and finally meets the real Po.

I think this shows significant advancement of Cerebus' character. As Po puts it: 'obstacles exist to be bypassed; and where that isn't possible they are to be overcome or eliminated entirely. "The more worthwhile the road, the more seductive will be the paths divergent from it." ' Cerebus' trip through the Seventh and Eighth Spheres is a spiritual journey. He is offered several temptations but rises above them and sticks to his intentions, breaking through in the end to what Po calls 'a new reality.'

As Po sees it, Cerebus has 'seen the futility of grasping after power and wealth and notoriety.' Po believes that this is the first time it has been worthwhile for him to interact with Cerebus because there is little chance that the interview *will* affect events. Nevertheless, Cerebus' dialogue with Po will alter the future course of his actions.

What does Po have to say? Firstly,

that the Judge is exactly that — a judge. He is not impartial and his interpretations of events are not to be trusted. Secondly, from what Po tells us of his own history, we can see that history is cyclical. Look at what he tells us about his son Alfred and then examine Cirin. It's something to think about. Also: Po's second life, his trial by Suenteus Po III and the Council of the goddess — which Cerebus has experienced, playing the roles of both judges this time around. In the version of events which Cerebus experienced, though, events intervened and Astoria did not die. Po believes this to be cause for hope; Cerebus does not copy events, he changes the pattern. Thirdly: the bit with K'cor, where K'cor has become a pawn of his queen. Cerebus has a vision of Astoria, and Po tells him, 'You would do well to muse on that and keep it always close to your thoughts.' But Cerebus has already *been* Astoria's pawn once — I can't see him falling into that trap again. I notice, following Po's discourse regarding the Queen, Cerebus chooses not to copy Po's chess move but goes for another pawn, rather than the queen that Po used. He is an innovator, not a mimic. He was probably also scared about what he might see. Fourth: Bran the Bishop. It is interesting to note that the Roach has taken on the significant qualities of this gamepiece. He has also, just, acquired aspects similar to those of K'cor, in that he has now found his Queen. It cannot be insignificant that the Roach is one of the characters most profoundly affected by Cerebus' career so far. The Cootie is part of the pattern of change initiated by Cerebus.

With one move, Po wins the Chess game, and that move is the taking of a pawn. I believe this to be highly significant. I'm waiting to see who the pawn will be.

Right. That's all my plot devices, or at least, all of them that I can say anything about. Now, based on all this information, all I have to do is work out what I should be thinking about, right?

Primary in my mind is the repetition of events. Look at the behaviour of the Pigs. The first thing I thought when I read 162 was, "At this rate, there aren't going to be any of them left!" which was missing the point a bit. Isn't this exactly how Suenteus Po put his first army together? The Cirinists have isolated themselves

(although Elrod manages to get past the barriers) — is that not exactly what the earlier matriarchy did when Suenteus Po's son Alfred invaded all those years ago? Cirin's isolation within her organisation, however, reminds me of Alfred himself. Bran has been shown to be a soul who forever repeats his mistakes, a leader who declares his belief in another's cause and so loses the faith of his people, yet now the Roach has acquired some of these qualities, as well as those of the King who becomes a pawn of his Queen (which we have had demonstrated to us in K'cor). I'm sure there are others.

Pondering these events, I have to ask: is history following a cycle because of Suenteus Po's obsessions with his game? We know that he manipulates people and events, and he admits that Chess is a ritualisation of history; "Chess . . . was never invented. Chess is merely The Story seeking a physical manifestation and finding it." We see that, in the current version of events, a different pattern is emerging, yet it is still only a re-working of the story, mixing the same elements in a different way. Is this because Po only has certain elements available to him in the game he chooses to play, so all he can do is change the way these elements interact? If so, then surely Po himself is the anchor that keeps events from progressing?

The other thing I'm thinking about is Elrod. I've mentioned to you before that I think he is a hidden conspirator, hiding behind a mask of idiocy, and everything I've seen in *Mothers and Daughters* seems to confirm this. Examine Elrod's reaction when the Roach claims to have found his Queen — he's horrified because his plans have gone awry. That's what I think, anyway.

I'm probably completely wrong. The trouble with any personal interpretation of another person's work is that the interpreter can fall into the trap of allowing his or her own prejudices to colour their perceptions. So I'd appreciate it if you'd let me know how well I'm doing — although a lot of the fun of reading *Cerebus* comes from waiting for the revelations to come along.

Still, how am I doing? Help me out here.

Yours,

Mike Sivier
9, Greenacre Road
Whitchurch
BRISTOL
BS14 0HL
England

You're doing fine. Way off in your suspicions of Elrod, but apart from that...

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I noted with interest your plug for YAHOO. Since YAHOO is now on near-infinite hiatus pending the completion of the seven-part PALESTINE mini-series, I was wondering if you would be willing to offer up some kind of blurb for this new project. I have enclosed a complete Xerox of the first issue, which will be published in December.

Sorry I missed you on your trek through Seattle.

Best wishes,

Kim Thompson
Fantagraphics Books
7563 Lake City Way NE
Seattle, Washington
USA 98115

P.S.: I've read *Sandman*, but I don't much care for it. Is this a more serious or less serious sin? (Parts of the issue Charlie Vess drew were well written, though.)

I've resolved not to have any interaction with Fantagraphics until I see how the next few issues of the *Comics Journal* go, Kim. No offense, but I think for the moment, you guys do more harm than good for advancing the medium. Your P.S. is a classic example of the *Comics Journal's* sneering arrogance.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave Sim,

I love *Cerebus*, I have all the Phone books and have got one or two other people onto *Cerebus* since I started. I am an aspiring illustrator myself and *Cerebus* art is one of the best going. It has a unique character and Gerhard is one of the few I have seen able to get a soft smooth texture using straight lines. *Cerebus* #162 — UK Tour '93 — PLEASE come to Dublin. Most likely we won't have the money to go to Britain to see you, so PLEASE come to see us.

Thank you anyway,

David Smith
Tankardstown, Navan Co.

Meath, Ireland

I'd be happy to if there's a store (or group of stores) willing to pay for London to Dublin airfare and hotel accommodations before or after UKCAC '93.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

You gotta help me, man!

It started about a week ago, when every pencil I picked up would annoyingly break off at the point.

Then, three days ago I was trying to pull a nail out of a wall and the hammer snapped at the base of the head. Two days ago I was digging into a pint of fresh-from-the-grocery-store-freezer Haagen Dazs and my spoon fractured in the same way. And yesterday my ignition key broke off in the steering column.

So, the big question.

If my girlfriend wants to have sex with me tonight, do I risk it?

Celibately,

Brian Zatkow
1801 South Federal Ave., #208
Los Angeles, CA
USA 90025

(yes, I made it)

You might try reinforcing your condom with electrician's tape.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

It occurred to me recently that I owed you a big "Thank You". Why? Because it was you and the short, gray aardvark that introduced me to alternative comics. When I bought my first issue of *Cerebus* #11, I was still reading stuff like *The Defenders* and *The Micronauts*. *Master of Kung Fu* was my favorite comic.

If it hadn't been for you and *Cerebus*, I probably never would have tried other alternative comics like *Elfquest*, *Groo the Wanderer*, *American Splendor* or *Love and Rockets*. In other words, I wouldn't know just how good comics can be. In fact, if it weren't for those comics that I've already mentioned and a few others like *Usagi Yojimbo* and *Hate*, I probably would have given comics up a long time ago.

So thanks, Dave. Also, thanks for autographing my copy of 51 and autographing and doing a *Cerebus* head sketch in my *Swords*, Volume 1 when you were at *25th Century*

Five and Dime. I couldn't make it to Bloomington that day so I mailed this stuff to Mike, and he took care of it for me.

By the way, I remember reading years and years ago in *Amazing Heroes* that you and Marvel Comics were going to do a *Cerebus/X-Men* crossover. (Right now I can hear all your newer fans saying "Say it ain't so, Dave). Why do I bring this up?

It just occurs to me how much smaller the comics industry used to seem. At the time, I got all excited. I thought that such a story would be Way Cool. Today, the whole idea seems utterly ridiculous. I'm sure there's a lesson here somewhere, but other than "Things change." I can't imagine what that lesson is.

Before I go, I'd like to put in my two cents regarding your Gary Groth editorial. These days, the **only** time I read the *Comics Journal* is when it has an interview with someone whose viewpoints interests me. This short list includes Crumb, the Hernandez Brothers, Bill Watterson, Matt Groening and you. I could also see myself getting excited about Charles Schulz, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Peter Bagge and perhaps a few others.

Other than that, I usually give the *Comics Journal* a big pass. It's always stunned me with its meanness and hatefulness. I think that you're right when you say that Groth is isolated.

Anyway, Dave, keep up the good work, and keep fighting the good fight. I fully intend to be around until #300.

Sincerely,
Tom Wellman
P.O. Box 147
Troy, Indiana
USA 47588

The *X-Men/Cerebus* cross-over founded in part on my misapprehension that Chris had control over the book befitting his stature in the field. He was always at the mercy of the powers-that-be (witness his shabby treatment on being forced off the book). I didn't recognize that at the time.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Starting off I'd like to say that *Cerebus* is now the only comic book that I look forward to each month, I mean, it has the best storyline, the best artwork, and the best characters. I've only been

collecting *Cerebus* for less than a year.

My first encounter with *Cerebus* was four years ago when I read *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* #8, featuring the little grey guy. Of course I was only ten at the time, and I couldn't afford the original issue, so I purchased the third T.M.N.T. *Graphic Novel* that First Comics had published. I was a big Turtle fan at the time (I still am today). Of course I didn't buy it because of the *Cerebus* appearance, (I hadn't heard about him yet remember) I bought it because I liked the Turtles. As I was reading the *Graphic Novel*, I came across *Cerebus* the Aardvark. I laughed out loud when I saw him. He was so funny, I really enjoyed this character. Well anyway, after reading that issue, I wanted to start buying *Cerebus*. I went to the local comic book store and looked around for it but I didn't find it. So I bought my usual comics and went home.

I didn't buy anything with *Cerebus* in it for three years until I read an article about *Cerebus* in *Wizard* #7. I read that you have just passed your halfway mark and that you were starting a new storyline. I then dashed back over to the comic book store and found issue #154. I bought it. I read it. I loved it. The following week I got my hands on *Mothers and Daughters* #'s 1, 2, and 3. (By the way, the timing of this story may be a little screwed up. So if you're thinking "Hey, *Wizard* #7 didn't come out when *Cerebus* #154 came out!", then that's my fault.)

Anyway, I'm now the proud owner of *Cerebus* #'s 151 and up. I also have the two phone book versions of *Church and State* (which was excellent by the way). *Cerebus* #'s 1 and 2 reprints of course, and *Cerebus* #100. I just felt like telling someone this story if you're wondering why I told you this.

Closing, I'd like to ask you a question or two.

1. Is that Khem the ancient Demon in #151 the same Khem that appeared in issue #2?
2. Since The Marx Brothers are in *Cerebus* did you get the name Astoria from where The Marx Brothers first went to perform their first play "The Coconut's" IN Astoria, Queen's?

I'm going to go now, but I'd just like to say, Dave, I'll be with ya until #300. Hasta Luego!!

A *Cerebus* Fan,

Danny Brenner
122 McGaw Avenue
Lake Grove, NY
USA 11755

Uh-oh. Another mainstream guy. Please, everyone remain calm.

1. Yes.

2. No, Astoria's name came from Mary Astor.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. President,

Thank you for your lovely short letter which I received some two years ago. I meant to write back sooner but isn't it simply amazing how time flies? (In case you don't remember — and why should you? — I am the bloke who translated the Norwegian letter that appeared in #135 for you.)

This time I am writing to comment on Philippe Deprugney's letter in #163 regarding a French translation of *Cerebus*, a matter to which I have previously given some thought. I would like to point out that *Cerebus* is available in the three shops that sell American comics that I know of and frequent in Paris (*Album*, *Actualités*, and *Désse*), so I assume that some sort of French market exists for the book. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that the French comics-reading audience, which is quite large, has never been very enthusiastic about American comics, and the translations that have appeared in France in recent years have rarely fared very well. As far as I know, European comics in America meet with a similar fate: not long ago, I heard an American asking who *Tintin* was.

However, if my experience is anything to go by, *Cerebus* might just stand a chance over here. A few years ago, a girlfriend of mine, intrigued by the drawings, had me read *Jaka's Story* aloud to her in simultaneous translation. I would point at the pictures and act out the characters' dialogue in French (My favourite was Oscar: "*Madame Nash . . . J'ai entendu que Richard a des . . . corvées . . . ce soir . . . et ne peut de ce fait accepter mon invitation.*"), and she loved it. Another girlfriend (Karine! Why did you leave me?) was quite interested in the Mick-and-Keef issues, and very much enjoyed the French translations of other American comics (*Watchmen*, *Rocketeer*, and *Little Nemo*) I gave her to read. Yet another friend, whose views on comics are rather austere, thought

that the copy of *Cerebus* #112/113 he saw at my place once looked quite intelligent ("... for once."). So, in short, I feel that with the right kind of promotion (in my case, involving sex and friendship), American comics, and *Cerebus* in particular, could be quite viable in France. Obviously, many of the references in your book would seem quite obscure to an audience not accustomed to American comics — the Roach and the barbarian issues would probably be received quite coldly, but I still think it's worth a try. I am bilingual and have done quite a lot of translation work (for which I was paid, I might add, you cheapskate), and would be very interested in assisting in a translation of *Cerebus*, so if Olivier Thierry or Philippe Deprugney or anyone wants to contact me about this, well, please do.

How do you feel about this, Dave? How about a Swedish translation of *Cerebus*? I'd do one if I could give Elrod a Danish accent.

Amicalement vôtre,

Martin Thomson
46, rue Liancourt
75 014 Paris
FRANCE

Mm. Let's stick with French for the moment. I'll be printing Olivier Thierry's address here (unless I've misplaced his fax again).

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave, Gerhard and Linda,

So Dr. John Polidori, who was always jealous of Byron and Shelley, finally got Lord Byron pissed off. Byron said to the good doctor (who he had taken to referring to, sarcastically, as "Polly-Dolly"), "Give it up, Polidori, because there are three things I can do that you'll never be able to do."

"What are those?" Polidori said, setting himself up as usual.

"One, I can swim the Hellespont. Two, I can hit a target with a pistol shot from three hundred yards. And three, I can write a poem that will sell 20,000 copies in a single day."

Or something like that.

And George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway were in Paris at the same time, in 1945, after the fall of Vichy France, in the same hotel. Orwell heard that Hemingway was in the hotel and went off to his room. The two had never met before. Orwell knocked on the door.

"Who the Hell is it?"

"Eric Blair."

"Who the hell cares?"

"Err . . . George Orwell."

Hemingway, who was busy packing, threw open the door. "Well, why the hell didn't you say so in the first place? There's whiskey on the dresser, pour yourself a couple of shots."

And General Patton, off at war in Europe, wrote in a letter to his wife, "You know what I want. It resembles the back of a skunk."

And Pompey said to his men, before they took off in their ships, "It is necessary to sail. It is not necessary to live." But he said it in Latin, so it sounded better than that.

In my Ontario Beer Guide, this is what is written about Creemore Springs Premium Lager:

"Creemore Springs Premium Lager is a wonderful beer. A really wonderful beer. A subtle beer to make you contemplate and wonder. And to drink."

I kid you not.

Thank you, and good night.

J. Stover

R.R.#2

Tillsonburg, Ontario

N4G 4G7

A beer that makes you drink doesn't really seem altogether uncommon does it?

★★★★★★★★

Hello Dave,

Just a quick note to tell you thanks for coming to the stores. I really enjoyed working with a professional like yourself. You communicated so well with everyone that they came away with a positive outlook on comics as a whole, not just *Cerebus*. Our sales are still high on *Cerebus*, and people are still talking about your visit.

I really enjoyed talking to you about all the years in the business. I sometimes wish those new stores would realize what they have now, as compared to what we started with. Boy! Have we come a long way. Some of us are really turning into "professionals".

I find that the longer I do this, the more opinionated I become and really know what directions I want to take my stores. So far everything seems to work out for the best; make the customers happy, make the crew happy

and me happy. That's all I ask and need.

I'm enclosing some photos of the signing — thanks again. If you are ever near the area, please call or stop by.

Thanks also from all the Zanadudes and Duddettes!

Perry D. Plush
Owner, *Zanadu Comics*
1923 3rd Ave.
Seattle, WA
USA 98101

Perry had only arranged one signing before, advertising it heavily, and had the guy (a very big name) cancel the day before. I'd like to thank him, personally and publicly, for taking the chance again. Thanks, Perry.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I want to thank you for being so generous with your time and talent about signing all the stuff I kept wandering in with over the weekend at the Seattle con and the downtown *Zanadu* event. And the sketches are great . . . I tend to get carried away with things and these were the first comic signing/con events I've ever attended. Hopefully I didn't try your patience too much in my over-enthusiasm to own lots of cool signed *Cerebus* things . . .

Actually, *Cerebus* has figured in a lot of 'firsts' for me in the last few months: it's the first comic I've read since the mid-70's when I met the Freak Brothers; the first comic ever that I've had to rush out and collect absolutely every bit of story for (immediately if not sooner!); the first signing event, and the first 'comic' convention I've attended, all in the space of about 3 months (a friend loaned me reprints of the first 25 issues around the end of July and I went nuts from there). Wow, is that a run-on sentence or what? (<—zippyism) Anyway . . . on to more praise and stuff like that!

The story in #163 is really cool! Since *Sandman* is the only other comic I buy on a regular basis, you can imagine how tickled I was to find 'SandRoach' there in the work-in-progress binder, not to mention his 'sister'. I haven't laughed so much in weeks! I also thought the thing with Cirin's sphere (when she had first dreamed of the size increase thing and the official went off on her own initiative to 'reason with' the

contractor) was really amusing (in a pathetically true to life sort of way . . .).

Anyway, what I'm trying to say in my dumb girlish way is, I think your comic is really great and I'm really glad I got to meet you when you were here in Seattle. The whole weekend was a bright spot for me in an otherwise dismal and depressing month (got dumped by the guy I was involved with the week before the con, that sort of thing; it really cheered me up to get to meet you).

One last thing: I thought your 'Last Waltz' piece in #162 was very interesting. As a comics 'outsider' I have been very much unaware of the issues that affect the artists/publishers, and I find your newsletters and such to be generally informative and worth reading. So kudos and all that.

Suppose I should sign off; back to work tomorrow and the corporate grind. Thanks again for your time. And patience. And the sketches. And the 'NOT GERHARD' thing (if you do another tour I promise to pronounce his name correctly...). Perhaps next time I write I will find something more inspiring to say.

Down with the Cirinists!!!!

Bye!

Kris (with a key)

P.S. Oh yeah, I forgot to ask when you signed the shirt I was wearing: will the ink run if you throw it in the washer? (God, I know I'm going to get creamed for that, oh well, how's this for a 'straight line':
————— hmmm, kinda dotted, huh.) Anyway, bye again.

If I'd only known that your boyfriend had dumped you, I would've hit on you shamelessly. (No, I mean, even more shamelessly); I would've at least signed the front of your t-shirt. The marker was permanent, so it should be safe to wash.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Congratulations, on everything.

I write as a reader, fan and retailer who like many, I'd imagine, has refrained until now because the task is so bloody daunting. However, after so many *Comic Journals*, with their grim editorials and matching distribution figures, I thought you'd appreciate a different picture, especially in the light of your proposal to conquer

Little England.

Here in Nottingham, Mark and I run *Fantastic Store*. It's one of six such comic shops — some in *Megastores*, others without — each run autonomously with its own manager ordering as he sees fit.

Now, at first glance the trends are essentially the same as anywhere else, reflected in Diamond's recent solicitation figures: brash superheroes fighting fit, alternatives to superheroes nowhere to be seen ('subdued' is the word I'm looking for).

But our own order and sales figures, both here and in Birmingham, tell a different story. Some of the discrepancies are astonishing. This, roughly, is what we actually sell, from the, ah, 'top': gross quantities of each of the four main 'X' titles (well, what did you expect?); shelves full of *Sandman* (close behind and rising fast); *Spawn*, *Wildcats*, and *Lobo* pegging with *The Hulk* . . . And then, well then, our tenth best seller is a comic you may well be familiar with: *Cerebus*. *Cerebus*, *Hellblazer*, then *Shade*. More of our punters buy *Cerebus* than *Wolverine*, *Spiderman*, *Batman*, *Aliens*, *Terminator*, *Youngblood*, all Valiant titles stacked up together, and all Bat spin-offs gloomed into one. Sure, there are the occasional prismatic glitches, but there's further good news. *Hate*, *Love* and *Rockets*, *Animal Man*, *Miracle Man*, *Cages*, *Doom Patrol*, and *Eightball* by and large beat 75% of Marvel and DC mainstream. We even managed to sell as many *Exit* (Neal Kana's excellent local independent — I feel sure you must have been sent a copy, he uses your printer, I believe) as we do any single issue of *Batman*. *Dirty Plotte* fares better than *Flash*, *Deadface* and *Concrete* excel, — far better than you'd believe if you studied the distribution charts — and we shift more *Cerebus* phone books per week than all Marvel and DC trade paperbacks of equivalent age put together (with the possible exception of *Sandman*). And yet we're a relatively mainstream shop. Which is why I find the Diamond figures so extraordinary, and, indeed, so very vulnerable to change. Do we make money? We're piling it in. We're not suffering for the sake of Art, we're profiting from its excellence.

The obvious conclusion is that, in spite of what you might read, it really, really doesn't have to be

this way. All it takes is a little effort, a few targeted suggestions, and quality sells. Of course it does. And when people see quality, they want more. All you have to do is make it available.

When I took over managing our shop in Birmingham for a while, before handing it on to Nigel, there was, for example, no *Cerebus* to be seen. The former manager loved *Cerebus*, I'm told, but catered for himself and customer orders only. Yet people asked for it. So I doubled the order. They sold out. I raised the order to Nottingham's total, bought in a whole load of phone books, plonked them in the window, and began recommending it. Of course, they sold out, and under Nigel's continuing support, demand grows and grows and grows. All this, within three months.

Now, I realise the above might come across as some ego trip, which is part of my reluctance to write, but that's not what I'm trying to get across. Because we couldn't sell so much *Cerebus* if it wasn't so bloody good. It has none of the benefits of big budget in-house advertising, film recognition or lowest common denominator mindlessness. Indeed its epic nature is daunting — "How many issues . . . ?!" No, its success lies squarely on its own merits. If we point people in its direction, that's our job. But without our interference, almost everyone who sees it is intrigued.

This is, in fact, by way of reply to Groth's pessimism, on the subject of which I will say just this, I consider *Comics Journal* to be the best critical comics magazine available. Much of what Groth writes rings true to me, and the figures produced and attitudes abounding are disturbing to anyone who believes in diversity, and is genuinely concerned about the future of this potentially magnificent medium. It's an incisive and justifiably critical magazine, and Groth among others often manages to crystallise into words precisely what I feel about recent and not so recent developments in the industry.

But, when I'm done shaking my head after yet another editorial I'm left too depressed and demoralised to push the stuff Groth would like to see sold. Yes, there's much to be critical about, but so much negativity breeds negativity. In contrast, having read your reply a couple of issues back, I returned to

the counter enthused. In the subsequent hour someone reading *Hulk* left the shop with a *Tick*, someone who reads *Tick* left with his first *Cerebus* — the *High Society* phone book (he returned the next week, as they invariably do, to buy *Church & State*) — someone ghettoed into *Sandman* (yes, I love it, but you'd be surprised how difficult it is persuading its readers to look at anything else, Gaiman or otherwise) took away a *Taboo*, and someone chortling over *Hate* agreed to give *Cud*, *Naughty Bits*, and *Dirty Plotte* a go (okay, it may have been a slightly different combination, but you get the idea). Most people wandering round a comic shop want to try something new (and if it wasn't for Mark, well . . . "I Too Was A Marvel Zombie" — god, that confession hurt!) And that's the reason Mark, Nigel and I are all doing this job — to provide information in a medium where there's no equivalent to MTV and the music press (yet another issue needing urgent redress if we mean to progress), to broaden horizons, promote independents and ensure a diversity, which can only be healthy.

What the former manager in Birmingham failed to realise, is that for the reasons stated above most decisions on what to buy are made then and there, in the shop, based largely on what they can see. Comics retail is not a passive job, it relies heavily on interaction within the shop itself. You're not going to make a difference sitting on your arse all day, playing 'Gameboy' (hell, you're not going to make any money either).

I could go on — there's so much to discuss. Like distribution (if I mention *Mothers & Daughters* #1, and Titan Distribution as just one example, I think both you and Titan themselves will know what I mean, Dave. In fact I'm sure that one single phone call has left me forever in their black books). Then there's expanding enthusiasm beyond the current market, censorship, love, violence and death, and the best brand of cigarettes for a Jack Daniels hangover . . .

But I should stick to the main two reasons for writing: the above, which I hope adds weight to what you've believed all along and now proved with your phenomenally successful US tour; and, something I've meant to do for far too long and at much greater length, to express my boundless admiration

for *Cerebus* — its wit, its power, its beauty. Some sequences — Jaka's return in *High Society*, Something fell . . . from C & S. *Cerebus* 'reawakening' during the *Melmoth* epilogue continue to move me like nothing else this side of W. B. Yeats. And Normal Roach was a tour de force. But it's the structure that stuns. Not sure what I admire the most — your patience, craftsmanship, or your guts. You deserve all the success you get, and I'm sure this is only the beginning.

I sincerely hope that when you do come to England, you'll consider a signing here in Nottingham, and/or in Birmingham. I can't say for sure, but I imagine we already have two of the most lucrative and enthusiastic *Cerebus* outlets in the country; and Mark, Nigel and I will all bust our guts to ensure you're done justice, and to make it a raving success. I confess that your announcement helped prompt his report, but I'd be kicking myself if you picked one of the high profile 'supermarkets' with more weight than us, without at least trying. Please let me know what you

think. The shops don't 'belong' to us, but we care

Thanks for listening. Thanks for everything.

Yours,

Stephen L. Holland
Fantastic Store
Virgin Megastore
6-8 Wheelergate
Nottingham
NG1 2NB

***Fantastic Store* is now a definite for the fall of '93. See you then.**

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave!

I enjoy your book(s)! I wish more creators in the field put as much thought and effort (and talent) into their work.

Anyway, I wanted to tell you that I've had the opportunity this past month to tell others about *Cerebus*. I'm stopped all the time and asked what a *Cerebus* is. I keep a couple of issues in my car that I can show these people and give them some background. Some seem interested,

others just want to know. Who knows, maybe you'll get a few more fans.

I understand one of my local comic shops has approached you about an in-store appearance. I hope you have the opportunity to stop here. Granted that Salt Lake is not a comics mecca, but I believe there are several people who would be thrilled to meet you, not the least of which is my brother, Chad. He is the one who got me reading *Cerebus* in the first place. He's been with you a lot longer than I.

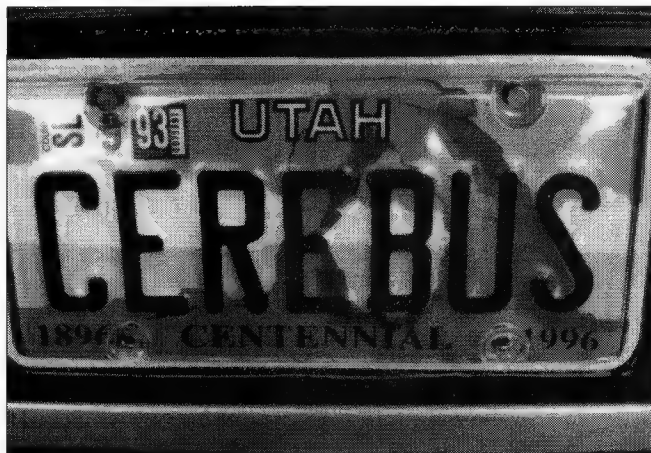
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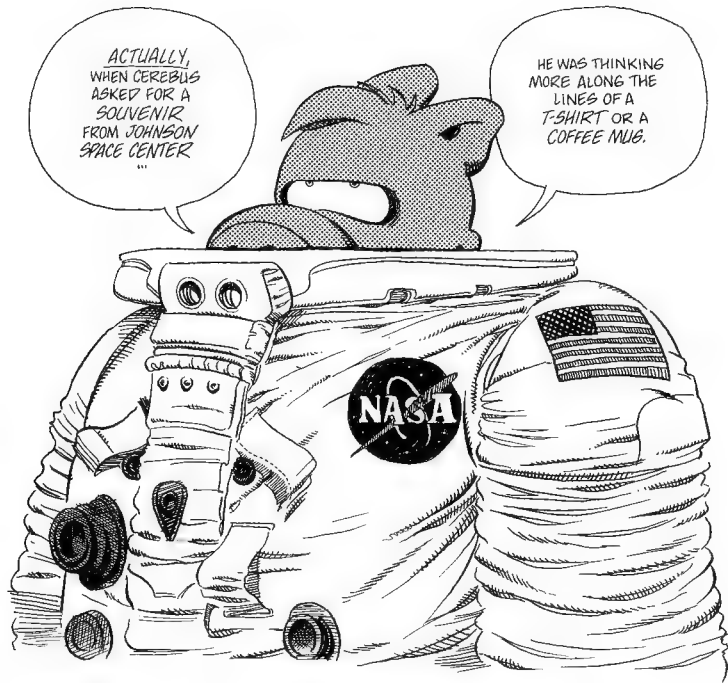
Craig Powell
3579 San Carlos
Salt Lake City, UT
USA 84119

P.S. After #300, how about hardcover versions of the trade paperbacks (including the epilogues)? They'd look pretty good in my library.

I'm definitely looking forward to making an appearance at *Nightflite Comics* in Salt Lake City.

★★★★★★★★





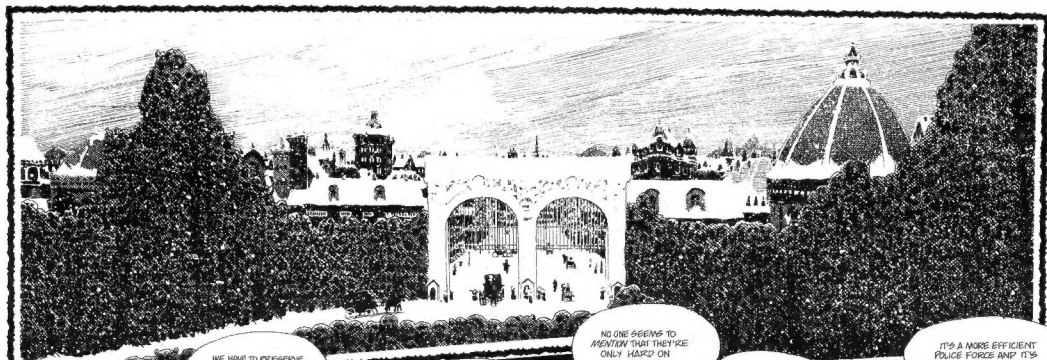
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ACQUAINTANCE IS
GONE, NOW...

WHERE IF
WHO KNOWS?
EXECUTED
I HOPE.

EVERY TIME I SEE
SOMEONE SUSPICIOUS-
LOOKING I JUST TELL
A GUARD AND THAT'S
THE LAST I SEE OF
HIM...

IT'S
WONDERFUL...

YES, EXACTLY. THE
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THE CRIMINALS
TAKE YOUR WORD
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A MISTAKE

"SAFETY FOR THE
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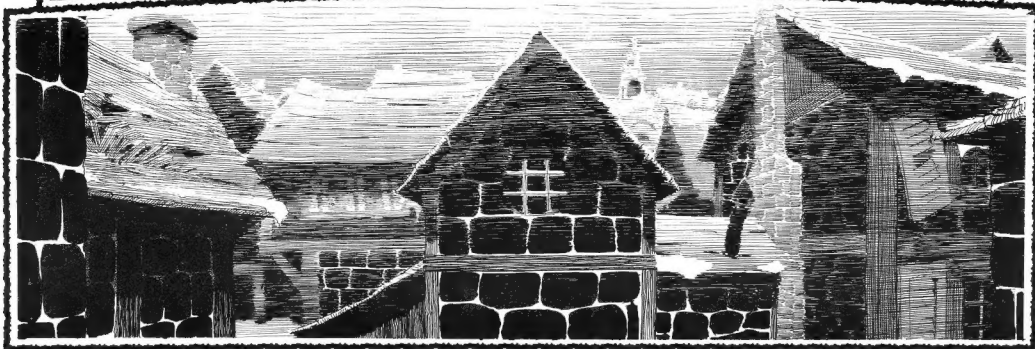
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